



Photo Credit: Sarah Girle, IRC

## PROTECTION COST EFFECTIVENESS BRIEF – Girl Empower

Liberia, 2018

### Executive Summary

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) provided the Girl Empower (GE) program, a sexual-health and protection project, to 772 girls in Nimba, Liberia in 2016. The 32-week mentoring program aimed to equip girls with the skills needed to make healthy, strategic life choices and stay safe from sexual abuse and exploitation; half of the girls' parents also received a cash transfer (GE+). An impact evaluation found the project was successful at reducing early marriage, increasing safer sex practices, increasing age at first sex, and reducing of the number of sexual partners of participants. This brief explores the cost-effectiveness of the program, given these impacts.

**The cost per girl for Girl Empower (GE) was \$1,158 and for GE + (Girl Empower plus a cash transfer) was \$1,230 (USD 2016).**

**For an investment of \$72 more per girl, a 6 percent cost increase, the piggy-backed cash transfers increased the impact on sexual and reproductive health by more than 50 percent.**

## Project Description

Adolescent girls in Nimba, Liberia report extremely high rates of sexual violence (37 percent of 13–14-year-old girls at baseline had experienced sexual violence, and 85 percent by endline two years later). Of the girls who report having endured sexual violence 55 percent met the threshold for post-traumatic stress at endline (Girl Empower Impact Evaluation).

The Girl Empower program aimed to reduce sexual violence, as well as improve school retention, mental health, gender norms, life skills, sexual and reproductive health knowledge and behavior, and protective factors. The program was implemented in 56 communities in Nimba County, Liberia from February to November 2016. The primary activity was supporting community mentors to facilitate 32 weekly life skills sessions with groups of 6 to 20 girls (772 girls total). For half of the groups, parents also received a small cash transfer (\$6/month, up to \$40) conditional on their child’s attendance at these sessions.

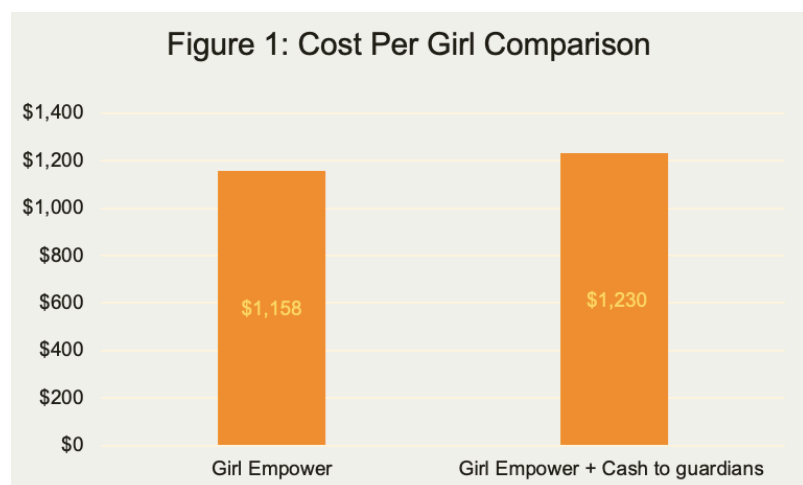
### Girl Empower Activities

- A comprehensive life skills curriculum implemented by mentors made up of young women from the local communities
- A safe space for the girls to meet with their mentors as a group and individually
- A parent/caregiver learning group that complemented the learning and asset building of the girls
- Capacity building and training of local health and psychosocial service providers to provide quality services to survivors of gender-based violence
- The creation of individual savings accounts for the girls with an initial deposit made through the program (\$14)
- Provision of solidarity kits for girls
- Conditional cash transfer to parents (GE+)

## Project Costs

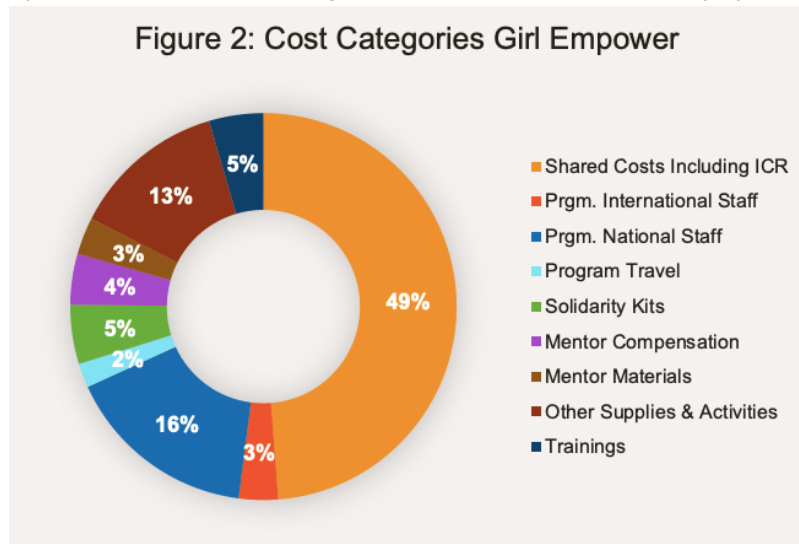
**Including support costs, the cost per girl for Girl Empower was \$1,158 and for GE+ \$1,230.**

A total of \$922,577 was spent on Girl Empower and Girl Empower+ over the start-up (Sept 2015 - Jan 2016) and implementation (Feb - Dec 2016) periods. This reflects a \$72 difference between Girl Empower alone, and Girl Empower + which included a \$40 cash incentive to caregivers (but cost an extra \$72 per girl due to cash delivery costs).



## The largest program-facing costs for Girl Empower were national staff salaries, solidarity kits for the girls, compensation for the youth mentors, and materials for mentors.

The cost of national staff salaries was more than double the amount spent on mentor compensation and supplies. Mentors—who were the primary implementers of the program—were paid \$35 per monthly cycle, or \$315 per mentor over the course of implementation. Mentors also received basic materials such as pens, notebooks, t-shirts, and a bag. Solidarity kits (the largest material cost in Girl Empower) include various items for menstrual hygiene: a bucket, soap, menstrual pads, a bag for used pads, underwear, safety pins, carry bag for menstrual supplies, torch, clothesline and pegs, and a pamphlet on menstrual hygiene.



### Results of the Impact Evaluation

The impact of the Girl Empower and Girl Empower + programs were measured in a randomized evaluation. The following key findings were identified, listed by impact domain.

- **Sexual and reproductive health (SRH)** – Moderate, positive, and statistically significant improvements in SRH ranging from 0.21 to 0.37 standard deviations better than the comparison group. Girls who received GE were less likely to have ever been married, less likely to have ever had sex, had a lower number of sexual partners in the past 12 months, and were more likely to have used condoms. The improvements in sexual health were roughly 50 percent larger for girls whose parents received the cash transfer (GE+) compared to the standard treatment (GE). There was no significant impact on whether a girl was ever pregnant.
- **Girls' gender norms** – Moderate, positive, and statistically significant impacts on gender norms ranging from 0.21 to 0.23 standard deviations better than the comparison group (i) girls' views on gender equity (attitudes about the importance of girls versus boys) and (ii) their attitudes towards IPV (whether they agreed that a wife deserves to be beaten within different sets of scenarios). These impacts were similar across GE and GE+.
- **Life skills** – Moderate, positive, and statistically significant improvements in girls' life skills ranging from 0.22 to 0.29 standard deviations better than the comparison group (i) knowledge of HIV, (ii) financial literacy and behaviors, and (iii) knowledge of condom effectiveness. These impacts were similar across GE and GE+.
- **Schooling** - Mostly positive impacts, but small and not statistically significant.
- **Psychological well-being** - Mostly positive impacts, but small and not statistically significant
- **Protective factors** - Mostly positive impacts, but small and not statistically significant
- **Sexual violence** - No impact

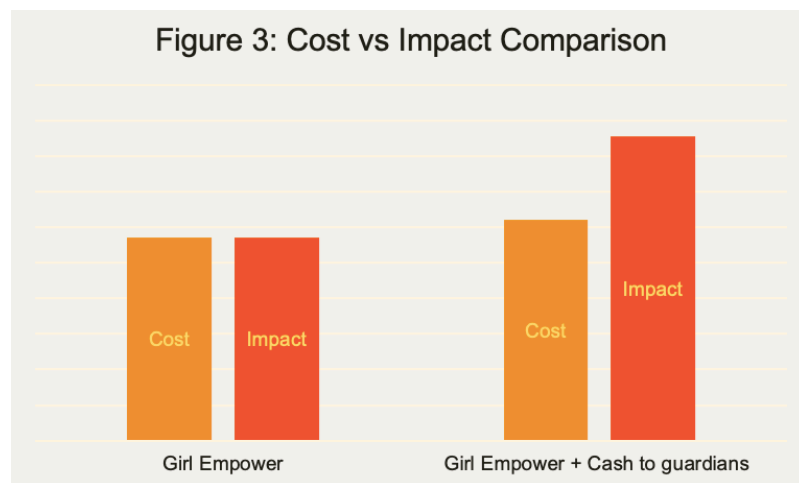
### Cost Effectiveness Findings

### **Girl Empower was effective and, with some changes, could be cost effective.**

Several programs run by other aid organizations in Africa demonstrated comparable impacts to Girl Empower.<sup>1,2</sup> This reinforces the findings found in the IRC impact evaluation. However, the cost of Girl Empower was over \$1000 per girl, while the costs of the most similar program studied (in Uganda) was approximately \$30 per girl.<sup>1</sup> While the programs were not identical, they both created girl clubs that focused on improving life skills and sexual and reproductive health. However, the clubs that cost \$30 per girl, reached a much larger scale (13,000 girls) than those run by IRC. This, coupled with additional evidence that economies of scale are important to increase cost-effectiveness of programming,<sup>3</sup> suggest that while Girl Empower as implemented was not cost-effective, but if focused and scaled-up in future program cycles, it could be.

### **For an investment of \$72 more per girl, a 6 percent cost increase, the piggy-backed cash transfers increased the impact on the SRH index by more than 50 percent. The program was more cost-effective with the parental cash component.**

Half of the parents/caregivers received conditional cash transfer of \$1.25 per session contingent on girl's attendance. A maximum of \$40 per girl participant was provided. All the girls themselves received savings deposits of \$14. The impact evaluation found the GE+ program had a 50 percent greater impact on the SRH measures than the GE program alone.



The addition of cash transfers for parents appears potentially cost-effective. The incremental cost of adding cash to parents was small (as a proportion of the overall cost of GE), but the amount of impact it created was substantive. It is important to note that the transfers leveraged the existing staff and support costs of GE. If implemented without GE, the cost per girl to deliver cash would increase.

#### **Analysis Method: Cost-Effectiveness at the IRC**

The IRC is committed to maximizing the impact of each dollar spent to improve our clients' lives. Cost

effectiveness analysis compares the costs of a program to the outcomes it achieved (e.g., cost per diarrheal incident avoided, cost per reduction in intra-family violence). Conducting cost effectiveness analysis of a program requires two types of information:

- 1) An impact evaluation on what a specific program achieved, in terms of outcomes
- 2) Data on how much it cost to produce that outcome

Teams across the IRC produce a wide range of outcomes, but cost effectiveness analysis requires that we know - based on impact research - exactly which outcomes were achieved and how much they changed, for a given program. For example, an impact evaluation might show a village that received IRC latrines and hygiene promotion had a 50 percent lower incidence of diarrhea than a village next to it which did not receive the IRC intervention. If so, we know the impact of our program: 50 percent decrease in diarrhea incidence. Cost effectiveness analysis becomes possible only when there is an impact study that quantifies the change in outcomes as a result of the IRC project.

At the same time IRC runs impact evaluations, we gather data on how much the evaluated program costs. First, IRC staff build a list of inputs that were necessary to implement the evaluated program. If one thinks of a program as a recipe, the inputs are all the 'ingredients' necessary to make that dish. Budgets contain a great deal of information about the ingredients used and in what quantities, so reviewing the program budget is the first place to start. However, many of the line items in grant budgets are shared costs, such as finance staff or office rent, which contribute to multiple programs, not just the one included in the impact evaluation. When costs are shared across multiple programs, it is necessary to further specify what proportion of the input was used for the particular program. Specifying such costs in detail, while time-consuming, is important because it provides lessons about the structure of a program's inputs. We can divide costs into categories and determine whether resources are being allocated to the most important functions of program management and enable us to model alternative program structures and quantify the cost implications of different decisions.

<sup>1</sup> Bandiera, Oriana, Niklas Buehren, Robin Burgess, Markus Goldstein, Selim Gulesci, Imran Rasul and Munshi Sulaimany. 2017.

"Women's Empowerment in Action: Evidence from a Randomized Control Trial in Africa."

[https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/research-paper/Womens-Empowerment-in-Action\\_Bandeiera-et-al\\_July2017.pdf](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/research-paper/Womens-Empowerment-in-Action_Bandeiera-et-al_July2017.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Bandiera, Oriana, Niklas Buehren, Markus Goldstein, Imran Rasul and Andrea Smurray. 2020. "Do School Closures During an Epidemic have Persistent Effects?." [https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/research-paper/working-paper\\_720\\_School-Closures-During-Epidemic\\_Sierra-Leone\\_July2020.pdf](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/research-paper/working-paper_720_School-Closures-During-Epidemic_Sierra-Leone_July2020.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> "Cost-Effectiveness Analysis Improving Parenting Practices in Liberia and Thailand." 2016. The International Rescue Committee. <https://www.rescue.org/report/cost-effectiveness-parental-coaching-programs>

This work was conducted by the Best Use of Resources Initiative at the IRC. For questions or more information please contact us at [airbel@rescue.org](mailto:airbel@rescue.org).

#### *Preferred Citation*

Hoyer, Kayla. 2018. "Protection Cost Effectiveness Brief – Girl Empower." The International Rescue Committee.

## Annex: Ingredients List

Liberia | 2016 USD



**Airbel Impact Lab**  
Research & Innovation at the IRC

<b>Program Costs</b>	<b>Girl Empower in \$</b>	<b>Girl Empower + in \$</b>
<b>International Staff</b>	<b>29,326</b>	<b>1,855</b>
Program Staff Salaries	16,297	1,031
Benefits (cumulative)	13,030	824
<b>National Staff</b>	<b>144,196</b>	<b>9,093</b>
Program Staff Salaries	116,708	7,383
Conferences and Meetings	440	-
Benefits (cumulative)	27,048	1,711
<b>Program Supplies &amp; Materials</b>	<b>266,311</b>	<b>14,812</b>
Mentors	37,989	594
Caregiver Discussion Series	5,612	-
Material Support for Mentors	27,638	-
Safe Space Materials & Supplies	3,620	-
Girl Group Supplies	13,010	-
School Uniforms & Shoes	744	-
Community Outreach Material	22,983	-
Meeting Supplies	6,147	-
ID Card Printing	1,938	-
Community Mobilization	10,208	-
Project Introduction	486	-
Visibility	4,982	-
Solidarity Kits for 772 Girls	44,223	-
IPC Materials for Safe Spaces	14,061	-
Safe Space Development & Upkeep	20,641	-
Girl Graduations	300	-
<b>Trainings</b>	<b>40,626</b>	<b>-</b>
Mentor Training	16,312	-
Staff Training and Capacity Building	453	-

CCS Training for Health Providers	5,088	-
GBV / Psychosocial Training for PSS Providers	18,773	-
<b>Cash Transfers</b>	<b>11,104</b>	<b>14,218</b>
Bank Account-Related Costs	-	50
Cash to Caregivers	-	14,168
Girls Initial Savings	11,104	-
<b>Travel</b>	<b>18,106</b>	<b>-</b>
International Travel	6,698	-
Domestic Travel	11,408	-
<b>Shared Costs</b>	<b>436,043</b>	<b>2,834</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>893,983</b>	<b>28,594</b>
<b>Cost per Girl (Girl Empower=772, "Plus" caregiver cash = 396)</b>	<b>1,158</b>	<b>72</b>